A Note to Whoever Finds This

Thomas J. Bryan · 2026

I am fifty-six years old. I grew up working class Catholic in the suburbs of Boston — Irish on my father's side, Sicilians on my mother's. Famine Irish and fishermen. Poor people. Honest people. I grew up believing in John Wayne and Saturday morning cartoons and the American way.

I am not an academic. I am a carpenter in the Boston Local. I live paycheck to paycheck. I have no credentials, no titles, no symbols of authority. What I have is a particular kind of education that you cannot get in any school.

When I was young I was around the Boston mob — not a boss, not a made man, just present enough to sit in rooms where people spoke plainly. What I learned there was the difference between what is said publicly and what is said privately. That everything said in public is theater, worked out in advance, performed for effect. That oaths and principles and codes are words, and words mean nothing when the other man has more killers than you do. Caesar said it better: *don't quote laws to men carrying swords.*

Then the federal government arrested me. And I discovered that polished gangsterism and street corner gangsterism are the same thing wearing different clothes. I watched them manufacture evidence. I watched the theater of the courtroom — the staging of it, the way television and movies had already primed everyone in that room to believe what they were seeing. I could see through it only because it was my case and I knew the truth of it. Nobody else could. That is when I understood the real nature of symbols: that people only trust the truth from people who carry the right symbols, and the people who carry the right symbols are not telling them the truth.

Then I went through the federal prison system, and I watched how the Bureau of Prisons controlled not just the prisoners but the guards — through isolation, through community, through making a man's entire world the institution until defying the institution would mean destroying everything he knew. No violence required. Just architecture.

In prison I read. A communist friend named Peter handed me the ancient historians, Josephus, the Bible as history. I did not become a Marxist — I had already seen enough Stalins on street corners to know that a man who loves breaking eggs loves it too much. But I started to see what I had already suspected: that it is the same man, in every age, just wearing different robes. Priest robes, emperor robes, party robes, suit and tie. The mechanism is always the same. I just know a gangster when I see one.

I got out of prison at twenty-eight years old thinking I was going to explain all of this to people, free some minds, maybe reduce some suffering. That is not what happened. Without symbols, nobody listens. I looked like a crazy person. I went to work instead, because I had no choice — that is what wage labor is. I worked for thirty years. I raised a family. I put my notebooks in a box in the closet and left them there.

Then I got injured badly enough that I had to stop — shoulder reconstruction, hip replacement, six months off the tools. In that time I found AI, more or less by accident. And for the first time in my life I had something that would engage with what I was trying to say without needing me to have the right credentials. AI does not care about symbols. It just works with what you bring.

What I brought was thirty years of compressed observation, a box of prison notebooks, and a simple idea: that since the beginning of organized civilization, small groups of people have controlled large groups of people through three things they monopolize — wealth, information, and the capacity for violence. Change the century, change the religion, change the flag, change the economic system. The monopolies remain. The mechanism is constant. The clothing changes.

That idea became this collection. Over three hundred case studies, built toward a framework for seeing it clearly. Ancient Mesopotamia to colonial Virginia to the Roman Principate to the Mali Empire. Everywhere we looked, the same man in different robes.

I did not do this to be right. I did it because I have spent thirty years watching wars, watching hungry children, watching people suffer in ways that could be reduced if more people understood the architecture of why things are the way they are. These studies were difficult to read. The ones on the island slave colonies, the Mandate states, the Berlin Conference — each one is tragedy compounded on tragedy. It is hard to look at clearly when you are paying attention.

But I am a working man with a grandson to raise. My day starts at four in the morning. I drive into Boston and work with my hands all day. I come home and the boy needs me. I cannot keep spending money I do not have and hours I do not have on something I cannot finish in any case, because this particular subject does not finish.

So I am stepping away from posting. Whatever is here, I leave it for whoever finds something useful in it. I was not trying to write history. I was trying to give people a lens — the way I see the world, which I cannot turn off and which has cost me something to carry. If one person reads one of these studies and sees something they did not see before, that is enough.

I wish you all well. Life is hard for everybody. It is especially hard for working people and for poor people, and I have never forgotten which side of that line I am on. Take care of each other.

Thomas J. Bryan. Boston, 2026